

OUR CHANCE FOR CHANGE: A Four-year Reform Initiative for GED Testing in New York City

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

One million six hundred thousand people in New York City – roughly equivalent to the entire population of Manhattan – are over 15 years of age, are out of school, and lack a high school diploma.¹ And yet less than one percent of this population, 10,732 people, received a GED (General Educational Development) diploma in 2006.²

These figures present a daunting challenge to educators and policy makers. In New York City, and in the country as a whole, jobs for workers who are poorly or under-educated have been, and continue to be, in steady decline. Our competitive global economy is increasingly technology-based and knowledge-driven. There is a growing demand for “knowledge workers” – individuals who can solve problems, learn rapidly, transfer skills from one job to another, have up-to-date technological know-how and are able to communicate effectively. These skills require, at minimum, a high school diploma, but more likely, according to most observers of workforce trends, an education beyond the high school level. As baby-boomers retire, especially over the next 20 years, it is projected that there will not be enough individuals with a high school diploma or college degree to meet the workforce demand.³ This situation leaves the over one and a half million New Yorkers without a high school diploma with few options to pursue a career, earn a family-supporting wage or achieve other personal goals. For these adults, the GED is seen as an urgent goal– the next step on the path toward college, family-supporting wages and life-dreams fulfilled.

For Jacinto, who came to the United States as a teenager from Puebla, Mexico, getting a GED (also called the high school equivalency diploma) was his path to a new and bright future. Working full-time, it became impossible for him to finish high school, but, as he described it, “My desire to reach my goal and get my GED never left me.” After two ten-week cycles of GED preparation classes, Jacinto, now thirty-five years of age, joined the 27,301⁴ individuals who took the GED test in New York City during 2007. However, in contrast to the majority of test-takers, he passed.

New York City has one of the lowest GED pass rates in the country (43%).⁵ This research study was commissioned by the NYC Department for Youth and Community Development (through the Mayor's Fund to Advance New York City) under a grant from the New York Community Trust to examine the city's GED testing system and to make recommendations for targeted reform and investment that would strengthen the system.

Through interviews, observations and focus groups with GED candidates, practitioners, policymakers and other key stakeholders, information was gathered to develop a comprehensive understanding of GED testing in New York City. This investigation revealed two interrelated reasons for why GED testing in NYC has become a barrier rather than a threshold to further opportunities. Simply stated, the NYC GED testing system functions poorly and is greatly under-funded. Thus, the recommendations presented in this report address both system operations and funding.

The first four recommendations in this study target reforms in NYC GED testing operations and efficiencies: 1) Improve test-takers exam readiness; 2) Improve GED test-site operations; 3) Develop NYC infrastructure for GED testing; and 4) Improve public awareness of the GED diploma. Implementation of these reforms requires focused investments of public and private resources that total \$3 million over the four-year period of this proposed initiative.

The fifth recommendation is to build the resources and capacity of the NYC GED testing system. The study recommends that state legislative resources for GED testing be increased to ten million dollars from its current level of \$3.9 million. This increase would ensure the long-term viability of the system and provide sustained support for test administration and ongoing implementation of system reforms.

The sixth and final recommendation is to ensure oversight and further development of reforms in GED testing. This recommendation would address the need for citywide coordination and evaluation of this initiative. The proposed recommendation outlines the formation of a taskforce to engage key stakeholders and charge them with the responsibility of overseeing implementation of *The Four-year Reform Initiative for GED Testing in New York City*.

The return on initiative investments would be substantial. With implementation of the proposed reforms, the initiative would generate the following outcomes:

- Triple the number of GED diplomas;
- Reduce the cost per diploma; and
- Create a comprehensive NYC GED testing system that is:
 - responsive to GED candidates,
 - integrated into GED preparation programs for disconnected youth and adults, and
 - supportive of transitions to the workforce and post-secondary education, and coordinated with other stakeholders including those involved in workforce development, school reform, and other programs for families living in poverty, immigrants, welfare recipients, and disconnected youth.

Through the implementation of this initiative, more than 40,000 New Yorkers, the largest number of city residents ever to have achieved the GED diploma in one year, would have the credential necessary to expand their options for further education, training and employment. Moreover, a foundation would be in place for the number of GED graduates to continue to increase in future years.

This reform initiative would be phased in over the next four years, its completion to coincide with the release of a new GED exam in 2012. Moreover, in addition to putting systems in place for the transition to GED 2012, the targeted reforms presented in this report need to be implemented in close collaboration with efforts to improve the city's economic health and quality of life.

Like Jacinto's journey to obtain his GED, the effort will likely be arduous, but the rewards great. Jacinto, now enrolled in a nursing program at the City University of New York Borough of Manhattan Community College, described his emotions upon receiving his GED diploma, "I jumped for happiness and tears came to my eyes. It was just too good to be true, but it was real! Yes, it was a long journey; working and attending school at the same time was tough, but not impossible. My desire to win was stronger than the urge to quit. I never gave up, even though at times I felt I couldn't go on. I learned that arriving first is not important, but knowing how to get there is. At that moment I had reached one of my goals. I would finally be going to college to pursue my dream career, becoming a Registered Nurse."

Just as test-takers are motivated to obtain their GED, this study found that people in the field are strongly motivated to support reform that results in attainment of the GED diploma for more New Yorkers. As summarized by a program director, long recognized for the success of her efforts, "Our testing system has never worked well. It's another barrier for people who are trying to change their lives. Working together we can change this. It's clear that this is something people want to do and are motivated to do. This is our chance for change."

II. INTRODUCTION

“Nothing would mean more to me than getting my GED diploma. I could work, go to school, be something.” As with this student who is currently enrolled in a GED preparation program, the most often cited reasons for taking the GED exam are the desire to work, the need to make a better living, and the hope of going to college. Along with these pragmatic motivations of GED candidates, comments that speak to personal fulfillment and being a positive role model are often heard: “I want to say, I did something for myself.” “I want a degree in a frame on the wall.” “I am taking GED classes now so my younger sister will see and do well in school.”

These individuals, and others like them without a high school diploma or General Educational Development diploma (GED), represent nearly **one out of three New York City residents who are out of school and 16 years of age or older**. New York City, with 29% of its population lacking a diploma, has one of the highest concentrations of adults without a high school or GED diploma in the country.⁶ As noted in the following table, a significantly greater proportion of New York City's population is without a diploma than the national average of 21% or the New York State average of 22%.

Table 1

2000 Target Population: The Number of People 16 Years of Age or Older, out of school, without a HS diploma

	US	NYS	NYC
Total Population 16+ and Not in School	190,978,243	12,776,394	5,357,328
Total Population 16+ Without a HS Diploma and Not in School	40,834,367	2,845,268	1,577,795
Percentage Without a Diploma and Not in School	21.38%	22.27%	29.45%

(Throughout this report, “adults” and “out-of-school youth and adults” refer to individuals who are sixteen years of age or older who are out of school and lack a high school or GED diploma.)

Each year an increasing number of New York City residents without a diploma seek opportunities to study for or take the GED exam. Since 2002, the number of people who took the GED exam reached its current peak of 27,301 in 2007.⁷ And although these individuals master the arduous application process (some test-takers refer to the GED diploma as a “diploma of navigation”) the credential being sought is obtained by fewer than half of those who attempt the exam.

Table 2
2006 Performance on GED Exam⁸

	Number of People Tested	Number who Passed	Pass Rate
US	580,107	398,409	68.7%
NYS	50,564	28,345	56.1%
NYC	24,976	10,732	43.0%

A number of current efforts (attracting an infusion of resources from the private sector and government entities at the City, State, and Federal levels) are underway to better serve disconnected youth and to provide instruction needed for positions with family-supporting wages or for transition into college. However, these initiatives are thwarted by the inability of the testing system in New York City to process applications for the GED exam in a timely manner and to provide environments and procedures supportive of successful performance on the exam.

As summarized in the following table, the large number of adults who lack a diploma combined with poor performance on the exam means that less than 1% of the New York City residents without a HS diploma receive a GED diploma each year.

Table 3
Population Obtained GED Diploma in 2006⁹

	US		NYS		NYC	
		% of Population		% of Population		% of Population
Total Population 16+ without a HS Diploma Not in School (2000 Census)	40,834,367		2,845,268		1,577,795	
Total Number of 2006 GED Test-takers	676,020	1.66%	51,780	1.82%	24,976	1.58%
Total Number of 2006 GED Diplomas	398,409	0.98%	28,345	1.00%	10,732	0.68%

These figures paint a very bleak picture – one that has a major impact on the social fabric and economic health of our city. A response that would support individuals in obtaining their diploma, enable the City to build its economy through a skilled workforce, and promote equality of opportunity and other social goals, would require an investment by all sectors in a rigorous, comprehensive plan to reform the New York City GED testing system.

A. Study Background

The aim of this study is to make recommendations for reform and targeted investments that will strengthen the NYC GED testing system and increase the number of individuals who receive a GED diploma each year. To achieve that goal, a broad overview of the testing system in NYC and suggestions for improvement were obtained through observations of test administrations and examiner trainings, and through interviews and focus groups with test-takers, test administrators, program staff, policymakers and representatives from government agencies and resource organizations. Seventy-seven research events – 9 focus groups, 52 interviews, 6 observations, and 10 field review meetings – were conducted. The ideas which emerged through this process provide the foundation for the recommendations that follow. (For a more detailed description of the study and research methodologies, see *Appendix A: Research Description*.)

The GED testing system is just one component of a much larger system of education and workforce development, but a critical one. Obtaining the GED diploma is the goal the majority of students express when describing their motivation for attending class. Most programs for youth development, job preparation, and college transition, use attainment of the GED as a primary measure of their success. Moreover, the GED diploma remains the mark of readiness for other employment, training and educational opportunities. Since it is both a motivating factor and an outcome measure, GED testing is a vital element in all of these systems; it cannot be viewed in isolation.

In New York State, as in all other states in the country, the State Education Department is the entity responsible for granting GED diplomas. Currently in New York City there are forty-six GED test centers located in a variety of programs and institutions – the NYC Department of Education, the City University of New York, Economic Opportunity Centers of the State University of New York, community based organizations, correctional institutions, psychiatric hospitals and other agencies serving special populations. Of the 24,976 GED candidates in 2006 (just a fraction of the older youth and adults in New York City who lack a high school diploma) 55% were males and 45% were females.¹⁰ Although the majority of test-takers were over twenty-one years of age (60%), seventeen-year-olds comprised eight percent of the total number of GED candidates, and a few test-takers, less than one percent (0.48%), were as young as sixteen.¹¹

“Ninety-seven percent of colleges and universities accept the GED as equivalent to a traditional high school diploma. More than 90 percent of U.S. employers regard GED holders as equivalent to high school graduates in hiring, salary and opportunity for advancement.”¹²

Test-takers who indicate that they have been participating in a GED preparation program,¹³ and GED candidates who are under twenty-one years of age,¹⁴ consistently score higher than other test-takers on the GED exam. Yet, the demand to enroll in adult education programs far exceeds the number of seats available. What's more, new initiatives of the NYC Department of Education, such as GED Hubs and the Young Adult Borough Academies, designed to keep young adults in school and to encourage those who have left to return, have not yet reached their goals. Therefore, recommendations to improve GED testing must be implemented in collaboration with efforts to retain students in high school and to increase the number of people participating in youth and adult education programs.

The GED Testing Service (GEDTS) of the American Council on Education (the non-profit agency that develops the GED exam) will introduce a new version of the GED exam in 2012. The GED Testing Service develops a new version of the exam periodically to ensure that it reflects the current curricular and academic standards for high school graduates across the United States and Canada. The initiative presented in this report is designed in part to respond to the transition to this revised exam.

B. Report Structure

Initiative Implementation Plan

Review of the experience of practitioners, test-takers and others in the field produced six areas of targeted reform designed to increase the number of people who obtain a GED diploma in New York City. Consistent with the principle that reform must combine improvements in the testing system with a greater investment of resources, the recommendations fall into three categories.

The first four recommendations address improvements in coordination and implementation of GED testing in NYC:

- I. Improve Test-takers Exam Readiness;
- II. Improve GED Test-site Operations;
- III. Develop Citywide Infrastructure for GED Testing; and
- IV. Improve Public Awareness of the impact and nature of the GED Diploma.

These proposed reforms, to be developed and implemented over the four years of the Initiative, would require a three million dollar investment of public and private resources.

With reforms in place that would greatly strengthen GED testing operations in NYC and increase the number of diplomas awarded each year, the fifth recommendation explores issues related to funding.

- V. Build Resources and Capacity of the NYC GED Testing System.

From its current level of \$3.9 million, this recommendation presents a plan to increase NY State investment in GED testing to ten million dollars. This increase in funds would support basic test center operations and maintain system improvements over time.

Recommended Investment in GED Testing

- 1) \$3 million from public and private resources to support implementation of system improvements.
- 2) \$10 million annual investment from the New York State Legislature to maintain system improvements and center operations over time.

The final recommendation describes essential elements needed to effectively implement the *NYC GED Testing Reform Initiative*

- VI. Insure Oversight and Further Development of Reforms in GED Testing.

Initiative Timeline and Investment

This section presents a detailed timeline and identifies resources needed to implement the *NYC GED Testing Reform Initiative*. The four-year timeline identifies implementation partners, summarizes resource requirements, describes the time period for development and full implementation of each reform recommendation, and provides projections of the number of GED diplomas that would be granted each year of the initiative. (A more detailed presentation of the needed investments and the return on investment is included in the *Appendix B. Notes*.)

III. FOUR-YEAR REFORM INITIATIVE RECOMMENDATIONS

A. INITIATIVE IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SYSTEM IMPROVEMENTS

I. Improve Test-takers Exam Readiness

Students who are referred to the exam by a GED program, in addition to receiving academic preparation, are more likely to be assessed on their likelihood of success in passing the exam, to receive information on exam procedures and test-taking strategies, and to take the exam in a familiar setting, perhaps even in the same location as their program. On the other hand, most test-takers are not associated with a preparation program and often think “the GED is easy,” underestimating the difficulty and breadth of the exam. They arrive at the test center having never met with a counselor or teacher nor having undergone an assessment of their skills. Of the people tested in New York City in 2006, 37% indicated that they attended an instructional program to prepare for the GED exam. The pass rate for these test-takers (58%) is over 20% higher than the pass rate for those who do not report experience with an educational program (34%).¹⁵

Failure on the GED exam for over 10,500 individuals each year dampens their motivation to engage in educational pursuits and fulfill aspirations for the future. Additionally, costs required to administer the exam – ranging from special shipping and security of test batteries to essay readers – are an enormous drain on the scarce public resources for administering the GED exam in New York City.

Beyond test-takers' lack of academic preparedness, limited familiarity with the exam contributes to low GED attainment rates. Numerous test-takers reported that they were unaware of what the exam covered, didn't have information about the exam-day schedule and procedures, were unfamiliar with scoring and were unsure of what they should do with questions when they didn't know the answer. Most test-takers interviewed, particularly those who had been out of school for a number of years, described problems completing the bubble answer sheet. The State Education Department GED Testing Office confirms this difficulty and reports that errors in the bubble entry of name and birth date account for the majority of answer sheets rejected by the automatic scoring system.

Eight states require candidates for the GED exam to pass the Official GED Practice Test, a commercially developed instrument commonly referred to as the “OPT”, prior to submitting an application for the GED test. The OPT (which takes half the time of the actual exam and includes half the number of questions for each sub-test as the full GED test) is designed to predict a test-taker's success on the GED exam. Additionally, it provides critically important experience for test-takers with exam content and administration. In New York City, although policy does not require all test applicants to pass the OPT prior to taking the GED exam, education program managers report extensive use of the OPT as an assessment tool. What's more, some programs, particularly those serving young adults such as the GED Plus program operated by the NYC Department of Education, require students to pass the OPT before referral to the GED exam.

The overall pass rate for the eight states that require the Official Practice Test is 82.7% compared with the national pass rate of 68.7%.¹⁶

To ensure that test-takers are academically prepared and have sufficient information and practice with the GED exam, a combination of screening policies and training resources, to be phased in over the four years of the initiative, are recommended to improve test-takers' exam readiness and likelihood of success.

- 1. Require that all students in GED preparation programs supported by City or State funds show evidence of having passed the Official Practice Test (OPT) as part of their GED exam application.**
 - a) Include as part of the GED test application the *Test Authorization Form* (the form that certifies passage of the OPT).
- 2. Give priority for testing appointments to applicants who have passed the Official Practice Test.**
- 3. Develop a print and on-line curriculum module that prepares test-takers for the testing experience.**

The test-taking strategies module would be incorporated into classroom instruction and be available online and at community access points such as libraries and learning labs. To reach job seekers and individuals looking for training and educational opportunities, the training would also be a component of the assessment and support services within entities such as Department of Small Business Services One-Stops, Educational Opportunity Centers, Department of Education GED Hubs, Literacy Zone Welcome Centers, and Adult Learning Centers. The module would include:

 - a) Information on test-site procedures;
 - b) An overview of the GED exam components and scoring;
 - c) An introduction to test-taking strategies;

- d) Suggestions for what to do the day before and day of the exam (such as resting, confirming the test site location and directions, and leaving enough time for travel to arrive at the test site on time);
 - e) Methods for dealing with test-taking anxiety;
 - f) Practice on use of the bubble answer sheets and completion of basic information on the test answer sheet. (Explore practices that would encourage test-takers to bring the completed candidate information section of the answer sheet with them to the exam.); and
 - g) Experience with the calculator used on part one of the math subtest.
- 4. As part of new procedures to be implemented with the installation of the GED Exam Version 5 in January, 2012, require potential test-takers to pass the OPT before applying for the GED exam.**
- a) Pilot OPT assessment models; and
 - b) Develop citywide policies for OPT. How often and how frequently can it be taken? What is required, if anything, to be done prior to retaking the OPT?

II. Improve GED Test-site Operations

While waiting outside the test center for the second day of testing, a test-taker described his frustration. “We were in a school; why couldn’t we be in a classroom? Classrooms are much better [than cafeterias or auditoriums].” Others agreed and added their suggestions. “If I were in charge, I would limit the amount of people and have the test sites more organized.” “Your mind gets tired working 5-6 hours. There should be breaks – more than 10 minutes. It’s not enough time for everyone to go to the bathroom.” “The test should be in the afternoon. Early in the morning you don’t get enough sleep.”

It was 8 a.m. on a Saturday morning. The individuals quoted above had completed two sub-tests Friday evening and were scheduled for the remaining sub-tests on that Saturday. They expected to be finished at 3 p.m.

This back-to-back testing schedule, used at many test sites throughout the city, is a hardship for test-takers who may need to juggle work schedules, family responsibilities and the stress of finding the test center in an unfamiliar neighborhood. After arranging for childcare, taking the train from the Bronx to Brooklyn and worrying about getting lost, a test-taker at another site described her experience, “The first time made me lose it. I couldn’t focus after some time. I saw it was 3 p.m., then it was 9:30 p.m. I was worried about my kids all that time.”

The three largest NYC test sites (serving 150 to 250 test-takers per administration) tested 36% of all test-takers in 2007. The pass rate for these large sites was 40.38% (13% lower than the pass rate for smaller test sites).¹⁷

While scheduling concerns were mentioned most often, noise and other distractions, uncomfortable furniture, lack of cleanliness and other problems with test-site conditions were often cited. Some test-takers praised their teachers and other program staff for their support, information, guidance and instruction. However, test-site personnel, who were often described as too strict, frustrated, distracted, or even “nasty” received little praise.

Many test site examiners indicated that their jobs are stressful, and leave them little time and energy to be responsive to test-takers. Under the current voucher-pay system, examiners typically receive \$250 for each exam administration, whether it’s done in one day or over several days. The exhaustive tasks they perform include ordering and securing test batteries and other supplies, managing the application process, securing adequate staff to proctor the exam, conducting intake and checking test-taker’s identification, overseeing the administration of the exam, reviewing all test answer booklets for completeness and conducting many other administrative tasks. Test-site salaries, to be set by the host agency, will vary under a new payment system to begin on July 1, 2008. However, this new payment system only partially covers test site costs and further stretches already limited local program resources.

All test sites reported difficulty in providing appropriate testing conditions and schedules. Competition for space, which can limit the availability of space to “less desirable times” and can include a test location being pulled off-line by an activity with higher priority within the institution, presents a formidable challenge. Day-time and summer administrations of the exam are particularly difficult to schedule because “space is fully utilized by important activities,” according to an experienced administrator, or “the facility is closed for the season.” The new method for paying test sites (the State Education Department will pay the testing agency \$20 for each person tested) will create added demands on the institutions hosting test centers and will provide a disincentive for spreading the test administration over several days or for offering additional break time.

The implementation of Version 5 of the GED Exam, to be introduced in 2012, will place additional burdens on the testing system. Historically, the number of exam applications grows dramatically as test-takers try to obtain their diplomas prior to implementation of a new version. Typically, scores on subtests of the exam that have been passed are carried over to subsequent re-takes of the exam. Transition to a new version of the exam, however, does not allow for passing subtest scores to be carried from the old version to the new. Therefore, test-takers will need to re-take the entire exam. GEDTS reports that there was a 24% increase in the number of test-takers prior to implementation of the GED Exam Version 4 in 2002.¹⁸ In New York City, in order to manage the bump in the number of applications, additional exams were scheduled during the last months before the conversion.¹⁹

GED testing operates in an ever-changing environment. Space restrictions, inadequate resources and changes in the field of GED testing greatly impact a test center's ability to provide quality services. The goal is to implement test-site operations that would optimize the testing experience for test-takers and support their best performance on the exam. The following recommendations outline changes in testing conditions, scheduling options and the practice of test administrators designed to improve GED test-site operations.

1. Improve testing conditions.

- a) Create more test sites that have strong connections with educational providers;
- b) Co-locate testing within GED preparation programs;
- c) Have smaller, more comfortable and familiar test venues; and
- d) Develop procedures for larger test sites that address wait-time to enter the exam, efficient management of the security check, examination of ID, proof of age documents and other application materials, movement to the test location within the building and adequate time and facilities to accommodate test-takers' needs during breaks.

2. Expand testing options.

- a) Increase access to the exam with more varied schedule options including day-time and summer offerings;
- b) Review distribution of testing capacity across the city and match with community and program needs;
- c) Examine test-day schedules to ensure that there are adequate breaks. Explore alternate schedules that may include testing over several days or breaking the schedule in two with a day in between; and
- d) Review the sequence of scheduling exam sub-tests. Consider alternating exams that test-takers typically find more difficult and less difficult.

3. Improve professional skills of GED test examiners and other testing staff.

- a) Conduct a comprehensive review and revision of the GED Examiners Training.
 - Require new examiners to assist in an exam administration prior to becoming a chief examiner;
 - Incorporate strategies to make the testing experience focus on the needs of test-takers;
 - Develop a step-by-step manual for examiners to use during the exam; and
 - Create an examiner tips manual.
- b) Implement training targeted to the specific roles and responsibilities of test site staff.
 - Provide separate training for management responsibilities and for exam administration; and
 - Develop formal training for clerks and proctors.
- c) Infuse training modules with strategies which focus on the needs of test-takers.
 - Address how to make the test environment more welcoming and comfortable; and
 - Incorporate strategies to reduce test-taker anxiety such as relaxation and visualization techniques.

4. Expand the number of test administrations prior to the introduction of the GED Examination ((Version 5) on January 1, 2012.

Assess conditions and space availability to develop, publicize and implement a plan to respond to the anticipated increased demand for testing as part of the transition to the new GED exam.

III. Develop NYC Infrastructure for GED Testing

A GED teacher in the Bronx, the borough with the greatest number of adults without a high school or GED diploma,²⁰ described his system for getting his students scheduled for the GED exam.

“I rarely find enough slots for all my students to get tested. Everyone takes the Official Practice Test, so I refer the ones with the highest scores, even though others are ready. Each student fills out the application we download from the SED website. I personally take the applications to the test centers where we have a relationship – five to a settlement house in Manhattan which isn't too bad because it's not far. I usually send three more as stand-bys who go to the test in case there are no-shows. Usually they get a postcard at home telling them they were accepted. If they don't get anything, I send them with a copy of their application that lets them in. Sometimes I can get four at a site in the Bronx. I take her [the examiner at the test site] an iced coffee with extra cream, a Sweet and Low and one Equal; that helps. We can always get slots, up to ten slots, at a program in Brooklyn, but it's so far. People get no sleep, have to leave early in the morning and are afraid they'll get lost.” “One did!” the program director interjects and adds, “It really affects the students' performance. The students who go there always have the lowest scores.”

Even though individuals who apply for GED testing wait, at some testing sites, 3 to 6 months to be accepted – an estimated 54% of test seats are left vacant.²¹

As the above quote indicates, getting a seat for the GED exam is built on personal relationships, perseverance and, sometimes, iced-coffee-currency. Multiple factors contribute to the difficulty of managing GED test applications. Without a database with information on when and where slots are available, or who has applied, been accepted or taken the exam, programs, and more often individuals not connected to educational providers, submit multiple applications to numerous sites in an effort to improve their odds of being accepted. Thus, applicants may be accepted at more than one site. This over-subscribing results in significant numbers of “no shows” for each exam, and requires test sites, without the funds to do so, to design various ingenious systems to manage capacity. GED applicants, in addition to citing multiple applications as a factor for not attending an exam, report problems ranging from childcare and work schedule conflicts to anxiety about the exam and uncertainty about what to expect as reasons for not attending a scheduled exam. Few in-person resources exist to address these concerns of test applicants. Typically, no phone number is available for the test site,

and often, when it is, the applicant is only provided a recorded phone message. Thus, communication between applicants and examiners is difficult or non-existent. In many cases it was found that GED testing centers operate in isolation from the services provided by the host agency. Testing staff, present just prior to and during the exam administration, are not generally able to respond to requests for information or advice. Communication is further complicated by the fact that test sites receive hundreds of applications that are for test dates already fully subscribed. Notification of re-scheduling is often received too late for applicants to make necessary arrangements for childcare and release time from work.

Re-testing is another area of concern raised by practitioners and test-takers, but their perceptions differ. Practitioners report that allowing students to take the test, even though they are not ready, will motivate them. These same students, on the other hand, feel that not generally able to respond to requests for information or advice. They are already prepared for the test. They are surprised when they fail and report feelings of discouragement and inadequacy. As one test-taker described, "For a year, I didn't tell my mom I didn't pass. And I never went back to school." Preliminary data from the State Education Department supports the view that test-takers who fail are not likely to be re-tested. Only 17% of the GED 2006 candidates took the exam more than once.²²

These issues and more are dealt with on a case by case basis, site by site, with few opportunities to exchange information and develop an understanding of the system citywide. In summing up the difficulties of navigating the GED testing system, one program manager stated, "We've been working this way so long, we saw it as a given; never thought it could be changed."

An efficient and effectively organized GED testing system must provide for timely, reliable and complete information; communication and planning across the city; coordination of operations on the local level; and systems to solicit input from test-takers and practitioners. The following recommendations will build those elements into the NYC GED testing system.

1. **Formalize the GED Testing Network as a component of the NYC Regional Adult Education Network (RAEN).** The NYC RAEN is one of seven regional networks in New York State established by the State Education Department to enhance coordination and support systemic change in the adult education field. As a component of the NYC RAEN, the GED Testing Network would:
 - a) Expand the current network, which focuses on programs serving adults, to include GED Plus, operated by the NYC Department of Education, and other programs serving young adults;

- b) Create necessary communication channels among test sites, education providers and workforce development programs;
- c) Address short-term GED testing implementation issues that may arise;
- d) Coordinate implementation of system enhancements;
- e) Analyze results and identify trends through a systemic annual review of data and experience;
- f) Develop systems for site monitoring and system improvement; and
- g) Establish the position of a NYC GED testing coordinator to serve as the liaison with the State Education Department.

2. Improve availability of accurate, timely, and comprehensive data on GED testing.

- a.) Develop a citywide GED testing application database. Include information on GED testing applicants, testing appointments, and attendance at testing sessions. Link the system to the SED GED website and incorporate systems for security and confidentiality of student records. Analyze data to better understand issues such as “no shows” and capacity utilization;
- b.) Convene a taskforce to examine NYC GED testing data. The taskforce would:
 - Identify data that are needed for operations, policy, research, evaluation, and planning;
 - Consolidate available information, identify information gaps, and develop a baseline overview of the need for GED in NYC;
- c.) Identify procedures for regular compilation of data that provide transparent and accessible information; and
- d.) Enhance State Education Department GED database and explore links to ASISTS (Adult Student Information System and Technical Support– the State Education Department management information system for programs supported with funds from the federal Workforce Investment Act (WIA) and other sources) and ATS (Automate the Schools, a data management system for the NYC Department of Education).

3. More fully develop the capacity and utilization of 311 – the NYC information hotline.

- a) Provide timely, comprehensive, accurate testing information to the 311-hotline system;
- b) Develop a phone response protocol (and tailor a response to young adults about high school alternatives);
- c) Include information on who to contact, schedules, hours, and locations; and
- d) Provide annual summary reports on usage, requests and responses.

4. Implement a feedback system.

- a) Encourage test-takers to comment on their test-taking experiences. In the mailing that provides test results, provide test-takers with information about how to give their feedback and suggestions. Include options for online, mail and phone communication. Additionally, provide procedures for feedback at the testing site;
- b) Provide opportunities for practitioners to share their experiences and provide suggestions for improvement at program-level and citywide network meetings; and
- c) Establish procedures for regular review of test-takers' and practitioners' recommendations at the site and citywide.

5. Identify field liaisons (representing the diversity in program providers, student populations and geography) to provide information and input into the implementation of reforms. These liaisons would:

- a) Provide a direct link between GED programs and testing services in the citywide GED Testing Network;
- b) Provide field information and input to the MIS design;
- c) Develop procedures of the Official Practice Test;
- d) Recommend test-taker and practitioner feedback systems
- e) Develop protocol for calls to 311 requesting information about GED or GED testing; and
- f) Inform the development of system enhancements (such as training modules and data collection and review).

IV. Improve Public Awareness of the GED Diploma

A small group of 18- to 20-year olds, who had already failed the GED exam once, talked about their discouragement and difficulty in committing to a course of study in order to pass the next time. In addition to struggling with their motivations for getting a GED, several said, “It’s hard, people don’t get it.” “People have bad things to say about it [the GED], especially in my culture. I ignore them, they are just ignorant. Some celebrities don’t even finish school, they just have their talent.” Another student commented, “There is a stigma to the GED.” “It’s the people who flunked in life.” “You are a bad person.”

One student, after passing the exam on the third try, said, “I couldn’t have made it without my teacher’s help. He made me study.” Most students spoke positively about the support and encouragement offered by their teachers. But gaps in information about the GED exist even with some of the more experienced teachers. As part of a meeting with practitioners, questions about the GED ranged from, “What languages can you take it in?” and “Is a social security number required?” to “What do the scores mean?” and “How can you pass all the sub-tests and still not get a diploma?”

Even policymakers, when presented with the information that 1.6 million New Yorkers lack a high school diploma, respond with suggestions for school reform and efforts to retain young people in school. **While these efforts are essential, and critical to stemming the number of young people who drop out of school, they fail to address the consequences of having nearly one out of three 21 to 54 year olds – our prime workforce and our community of parents – without a high school diploma.**

Gretchen Wilson, a singer who earned a 2005 Grammy, joined other famous GED graduates, such as Bill Cosby (comedian), Dave Thomas (Wendy’s founder and CEO) and former US Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell, when she earned her GED diploma in April 2008.²³

To improve understanding of the GED, its importance to the economic health and social fabric of the city, a robust awareness campaign with the following elements is essential.

- 1. Develop a training module to improve practitioners’ understanding of the GED exam, its policies and procedures.**

Incorporate this module into the Adult Literacy Education Core Curriculum (ALECC), the State Education Department’s training curriculum for adult education teachers. Provide a basic overview of the GED test addressing questions such as:

- a) Who should take the GED test and why?
- b) What content does the test cover?

- c) How many questions are there and how long does it take?
- d) How is the test scored and what score is needed to “pass” the GED?
- e) What does one need to know to “pass” the GED?
- f) What strategies help test-takers to perform successfully?

2. Develop a robust public awareness campaign to educate potential test-takers, community advocates, policy makers and the general public.

- a.) Include print and web resources that:
 - Promote the value of a GED diploma and its economic and social impact on society;
 - Develop profiles of GED learners;
 - Convey the rigor of the exam and its role as a gateway to college, training and employment opportunities;
 - Encourage adults without a diploma to contact an education program for assessment and academic services;
 - Encourage young adults to stay in high school or to return to high school; and
 - Encourage those who have taken the exam and failed to continue their studies.
- b.) Target specific audiences:
 - For the general public: (such as foreign consulates, community partners, elected officials and libraries) What is the GED diploma? What value does it have? How hard is the exam? Who should be tested? How does one get more information about free education programs and the application for the exam?
 - For community advocates: Add basic information about the exam, the application process, special testing accommodations, scoring, and links to the required forms.
 - For potential test-takers: Add information on alternative high school programs and GED preparation programs.

3. Modeled after the *Newest New Yorkers*, prepare a citywide report on out-of-school youth and adults without a high school diploma.

- a) Use 2010 Census information to provide a profile of New York City residents who lack a high school diploma;
- b) Include demographic and socioeconomic data such as age, workforce participation, country of origin, language, and family descriptors; and
- c) Provide comprehensive citywide descriptions and sub-group analyses (such as by borough and neighborhood)

RECOMMENDATION TO INCREASE RESOURCES

V. Build Resources and Capacity of the NYC GED Testing System

In addition to the system reforms identified above, new state resources are essential to the long term viability of GED testing in New York City. A \$6.1 million increase in annual New York State funds for GED testing statewide would bring the level of funding to ten million dollars, from its current level of \$3.9 million. (Approximately half of all 2006 GED candidates in New York State were residents of New York City, and approximately half of the state resources were allocated to support test centers in the city.) This modest investment would enable New York City to triple the number of people who obtain a GED diploma.²⁴

The allocation of resources to support GED testing in New York State has changed over the last few years. Until state legislation was passed that disallowed GED application fees, test-takers paid twenty-five dollars with submission of a GED test application.²⁵ Testing operations continued with the support of federal funds, and a smaller amount of state funds, until the use of federal funds was disallowed in 2004. Since that time, the state legislature has become the sole source of funds for GED testing. (In fiscal year 2007, the legislature appropriated \$3.9 million for GED testing statewide.) The New York State Education Department allocates approximately \$1.4 million of those funds to pay test examiners and proctors through a voucher system that tested 54,000 people throughout the state in 2007. The balance is used to cover the cost of items such as essay readers, administrative personnel, training of examiners, GED test answer sheets and testing supplies. The new system, to be implemented in the 2009 fiscal year, redistributes the approximately \$1.4 million to reimburse test sites twenty dollars for each test administered. This redesign, intended to expand the number of test-takers in the state to 70,000, will provide resources that fall far short of the costs to operate test sites and will shift a much greater share of these costs to local GED programs.

An increase of annual State funds for GED testing to \$10 million, combined with reforms in the NYC testing system, would result in a 3-fold increase in the number of GED diplomas awarded per year in New York City.
(Further information is presented in Appendix B, Note #24.)

The system can't be squeezed any tighter before it falls apart. An adult education system that is widely recognized as under-funded²⁶ is assuming yet another major responsibility. In an effort to delay this deterioration, test site coordinators, working closely with the State Education Department, and through its NYC Regional Adult Education Network (RAEN), are attempting to certify new test examiners and coordinate a smooth transition to the new test sites. But many managers continue to be skeptical. "My staff is ready to revolt," announced one literacy program manager at a recent meeting of test site directors. Another echoed, "There's no way that we can adequately respond to the hundreds of calls we get every week, not to mention the walk-ins that are desperate to get information."

The expansion of state resources for GED testing in New York City would have impact in two important ways. First, increased budgets, to cover test site staff and other basic administration expenses, would fortify a fragile GED testing system. Second, the return on investment – triple the number of people who obtain a GED diploma – would result in 40,000 additional New Yorkers each year who, because of obtaining a GED diploma, would now be eligible for new employment, training and education opportunities.

This investment in tomorrow's workforce requires strategic partnerships among practitioners, union and business leaders, policymakers and advocates in the public and private sectors. The following recommendations identify key strategies to increase state resources for GED testing in New York State to ten million dollars, from its current level of \$3.9 million.

1. Launch a robust advocacy campaign to:

- a) Promote public understanding, and understanding within the field, that it is important to look beyond the GED to training, college, and employment or better employment;
- b) Establish the need for funding GED testing as a legislative priority in advocacy efforts that currently address the needs of disconnected youth, welfare families, immigrants, adjudicated populations, individuals who are under-employed or under-educated, and others living in poverty in NYC;
- c) Inform and involve other social service, health and economic development advocacy groups as partners in advocating for GED testing; and
- d) Develop public policy that looks broadly at workforce needs and incorporates basic education/GED services into the framework.

2. Provide ten million dollars in State resources to support a basic GED testing system.

As part of a larger expansion of education and workforce development funds for out-of-school youth and adults:

- a) Fully leverage existing resources;
- b) Greatly enrich funding of GED test sites;
- c) Increase hours and pay of examiners and other testing site staff;
- d) Fully fund program improvements; and
- e) Develop a system for dispersment of resources after reviewing and assessing systems in other states that incorporate test fees, incentives for quality outcomes or built-in cost escalation formulas.

RECOMMENDATION FOR SYSTEM OVERSIGHT

VI. Insure Oversight and Further Development of Reforms in GED Testing

As was said by a senior city administrator, “Anyone can design a system; implementation is the key to anything being successful.” Many of her ideas for how to improve GED testing in NYC have been incorporated into this report, but none more so than her suggestion to pay attention to implementation. There is no citywide entity, council or workgroup that sees GED testing as part of its charge or is positioned to take on the critical responsibility of overseeing and evaluating this plan for reform. In addition to oversight, learning from the experience of other states is an important aspect of successful implementation. Certain reforms being proposed have already been implemented in other parts of the country. A better understanding of what works, what doesn't work, and what challenges have been encountered and how they were addressed, could inform implementation of reforms in New York City. For example, it would be valuable to learn from the eight states that already require test applicants to pass the Official Practice Test and to review the experience of new jurisdictions, such as Washington, D.C., that are currently implementing this policy. Knowledge about GED testing practices in other parts of the country, particularly other large urban areas, could also inform policy on issues related to age, residency and fee requirements of applicants.

Other questions about GED testing require a more careful examination of practice in New York City. What do we know about the needs of individuals who take the exam in French or Spanish? Why are so few exams given with accommodations? Explore the perception that an increasing number of youth are leaving high school to take the GED exam. What factors support young adults in taking and passing the GED exam? Why has the pass rate for women been consistently 10% less than the rate for men?²⁸ These and other questions need to be addressed to make certain that the GED testing system in NYC is effectively serving its diverse populations.

Since 2003, the number of NYC GED candidates who are 21 or older has increased by 28%, while the number of GED candidates under 21 years of age has remained relatively constant.²⁷

The following recommendations ensure oversight of this plan and further development of GED testing reforms in New York City.

1. Establish a NYC GED Testing Taskforce to oversee and assess implementation of targeted reforms.

- a) Identify NYC GED Taskforce leader(s) to plan and direct taskforce development and implementation of its work;
- b) Engage key stakeholders from the private sector, government agencies, public office, the corporate community and adult education field to participate in the NYC GED Taskforce;
- c) Assess current conditions and carefully review and revise *Reform Initiative Recommendations* to determine specific taskforce goals, objectives and investments; and
- d) Establish effective work groups and communication procedures.

2. Conduct supplemental research to address key areas of implementation.

- a) Identify successful GED testing practices in other parts of the country serving large, diverse urban populations;
- b) Examine strategies for the transition to OPT requirements; and
- c) Explore potential for application of best practices in NYC.

3. Further research links with other education providers such as unions, after-school programs, proprietary schools and programs serving populations with special needs such as:

- a) Young adults;
- b) Individuals who need testing accommodations;
- c) Adults with limited vision who may need screening and services;
- d) People who are seeking to take the GED exam in Spanish and French; and
- e) Women.

4-YEAR REFORM INITIATIVE FOR GED TESTING IN NEW YORK CITY

B. TIMELINE AND INVESTMENTS*

Reform Recommendation	Implementation Partners	Public/Private Initiative Investment	Legislative System Investment	2008	2009	2009	2010	2010	2011	2011	2012
SYSTEM IMPROVEMENTS:											
I. Improve Test-takers Exam Readiness											
1. Require <u>Students</u> to Pass OPT	SED Policy, Students & Field Implementation										
2. OPT Applicants Receive Priority	SED Policy, Field Implementation										
3. Test-takers Readiness Module	Specialists, Field sites, Test-takers	\$70,000									
4. OPT Requirement for All Test Applicants	SED Policy, Test-taker & Field Implementation		\$10,000,000 Total								
4a. Pilot OPT Assessment Models	Ed Providers, Test Centers & Test-takers	\$150,000									
4b. Develop Procedures for OPT	OPT Pilot Sites, GED Liaisons, SED										
II. Strengthen GED Test-site Operations.											
1. Improve Testing Conditions	SED, Test Centers & Test Center Agencies		\$10,000,000 Total								
2. Expand Testing Options	SED, Test Centers & Test Center Agencies		\$10,000,000 Total								
3. Improve professional skills of GED Test examiners and other testing staff	SED. Test-site Staff, & Field Partners input	\$500,000									
4. Increase # of Test Administrations Prior to Release of GED Exam Version 5	SED & Test Centers		\$10,000,000 Total								
III. NYC GED Testing Infrastructure											
1. Formalize GED Testing Network	SED/NYC RAEN	\$500,000									
2a. Create Testing Schedule/Application MIS	Specialist, Field input	\$290,000									
2b. Convene Data Group	Specialist, Field input	\$30,000									
2c. Develop Data Procedures	Specialist, Field input	\$15,000									
2d. Enhance SED GED Database	SED	\$10,000									
3. Develop 311 capacity	City GED Liaison										
4. Test-taker and Practitioner Feedback	SED GED Liaison										
5. GED Field Liaisons	Selected Test Centers	\$1,000,000									

Reform Recommendation	Implementation Partners	Public/Private Initiative Investment	Legislative System Investment	2008	2009	2009	2010	2010	2011	2011	2012
IV. Improve Awareness of GED Diploma											
1. ALECC Training for Practitioners	LAC/Support Agency	\$70,000									
2. Public Awareness Campaign	Support Agency and Corp Partner	\$45,000									
3. City Planning Report on Individuals Without a Diploma	NYC Department of City Planning										
SYSTEM RESOURCES											
V. Build Resources for NYC GED Testing											
1. Launch Advocacy Campaign	Consortium of Advocacy Groups	\$200,000									
2. Increase State Support to \$10 million	Consortium of Advocacy Groups		\$10,000,000 Total								
SYSTEM OVERSIGHT											
VI. Oversight & Development of Reforms											
1. Establish NYC GED Testing Reform Committee	SED, Private & field stakeholders	\$40,000									
2. Research Implementation Areas	Specialist with Field Input	\$35,000									
3. Additional Research of Other Providers and Populations with Special Needs	Specialist with Field Input	\$45,000									
TOTAL 4-YEAR INITIATIVE INVESTMENT		\$3,000,000									
RETURN ON INVESTMENT ^{6.}											
Number of GED diplomas per year					15,708		18,973		26,867		40,080

1. The first column identifies the reform. (Refer to section III *Four-year Reform Initiative: Implementation Plan* for more detail.)
2. The second column identifies key players needed to implement the reform.
3. The third column specifies the public/private funds needed to implement the reform. (Refer to *Appendix B. Notes #29* for more detail.)
4. The fourth column identifies target areas for the increase to \$10 million in State resources for GED testing. (Approximately half would be for NYC.)
5. The final columns present a timeline for implementation. The lighter shades on a row indicate development of the reform. The darker shades indicate full implementation. No shading indicates that the reform has not yet begun or is completed.
6. The projected cost per diploma would decrease to \$124.75 from its current level of \$168.10. (Refer to *Appendix B. Notes #29* for more detail.)

US President Election	NYC Mayor Election	NY Governor Election	GED Exam Version 5
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Appendix A. RESEARCH DESCRIPTION

Goal

As described in the proposal for this study on GED Testing in NYC, “the goal of this study is to develop recommendations for specific interventions and targeted resources that would strengthen the GED testing system in NYC.”

Research Design

Focus group, observation and interview methodologies were used to gather information from test-takers, exam administrators, program managers and practitioners, system administrators, policymakers and other key GED testing stakeholders. Cluster analysis was undertaken to determine the salient points and unique experiences for each group. The following list provides a summary of the core research activities for this study.

- **Structured focus groups** included:
 - Three groups of test-takers from programs operated by the City University of New York, Brooklyn Public Library, the NYC Department of Education and community based organizations.
 - Five groups of program managers and practitioners, who in addition to the programs mentioned above, represented State University of New York Educational Opportunity Centers, the Human Resource Administration BEGIN programs, the Queens Borough Public Library, and the New York Public Library.
 - One group of test examiners from test centers affiliated with the NYC Department of Education, the City University of New York, State University of New York Educational Opportunity Centers and community based organizations.
- **Constructed individual and small group interviews** with ninety people, the majority of whom were senior administrators and policy makers from government agencies and resource organizations. Additional individual interviews were conducted with seven test-takers at the test site. Three small group interviews were conducted at education program sites with teachers and program managers.
- **Field observations** included GED test administrations at two test centers affiliated with the NYC Department of Education and one affiliated with a community based organization. Additional field observations were done at three test examiner trainings.
- **Supplemental consultations and meetings** with national GED testing experts, researchers and data managers, system administrators and field practitioners.

In total, seventy-seven research events were conducted and follow-up contact or summaries were provided. The list of agencies involved in the research is included at the end of this section.

In addition to gathering data on GED testing in NYC, the research process incorporated the following objectives:

- A multi-layered examination of the experiences and recommendations of key GED testing stakeholders;
- Engagement of key stakeholders and dissemination of information to increase knowledge and to inform changes in GED testing practices during the course of the study; and
- Attention to GED testing in NYC that would serve as a catalyst for improvement.

Context for the Study and Limitations

The fall of 2007 marked a period roiling with change for educational programs for young adults and other adults without a high school diploma. The NYC Department of Education was in the midst of a major redesign of its GED programs including implementation of GED Plus programs, provision of GED instruction through borough Hubs, and establishment of three new test centers in NYC DOE programs. The Department for Youth and Community Development began a process of evaluating proposals to expand educational services, including GED instruction, to be provided by community based organizations throughout the city. The State Education Department issued an RFP to expand the number of GED test sites in the city and to revise the system for the distribution of funds to support GED test administration. Announcement of the new test sites happened in early 2008 with anticipated implementation in July of 2008. The Mayor's Office of Adult Education engaged a broad spectrum of representatives from city agencies and individuals from the adult education field in New York City in a year-long process to develop a vision of adult education for the city. The City University of New York re-designed some of its instructional services to provide GED instruction in the context of career skills or to focus instruction on transition to college. While these, and other changes, provide some uncertainty in the field of GED services, they also create an opportunity to positively influence GED programs and testing procedures as they are being revised.

It was in this climate of change that the study of GED testing in NYC was conducted. While originally conceived as a study that would gather information through ten research activities, in order to more fully understand the scope of GED testing practices in NYC and the changes that were underway, the study conducted seventy-seven research events. However, even with this expanded effort, time and other resources did not allow for sufficient examination of certain topics or sectors such as unions and proprietary schools.

The study began in June of 2007, too late in the program year to gather representatives from the various agencies involved in GED testing in NYC before summer schedules began. As a result, in place of an advisory group, individual meetings were held with each major sector involved in provision of GED services and GED testing to provide an overview of the study and to solicit their ideas and participation. Additionally, to announce the study and to obtain preliminary information from the field, the principal

investigator assisted the NYC Department of Youth and Community Development in the development and analysis of a survey on the provision of GED instruction and experience with the GED exam. Three hundred and forty-eight agencies that provide educational services and receive funding from DYCD were surveyed. A separate group of program managers and practitioners was established to advise on focus group protocol design and the selection of participants for the test-takers focus groups. To encourage further input from the focus group advisors, summaries for each session were circulated and feedback was obtained. For all focus groups a note taker was engaged and focus group summaries were distributed to the participants for further comment. Further input was obtained from the Department of Youth and Community Development and the New York Community Trust through meetings held in the fall and winter of 2007 and in the spring of 2008.

Principles for the Recommendations

As information from the field was analyzed, the following principles guided the development of reform recommendations:

- Build upon existing systems (for example, expand the existing *Regional Adult Education Network (RAEN)* – the existing coordination and communication system established by the NY State Education Department – to incorporate a GED testing network).
- Leverage existing resources to improve GED testing (for example, incorporate information on the GED test into the *Adult Literacy Education Core Curriculum* being developed by the Literacy Assistance Center for the State Education Department).

The recommendations are intended to be guide-posts to the *Four-year Reform Initiative for GED Testing in NYC*. In some instances, the recommendations provide detailed suggestions to expand the context for the reform or to give a more nuanced description of the desired change. Specific plans would be reviewed and refined by the oversight taskforce and agencies involved in the implementation.

Quantitative Component

While data analysis was not a component of this study, attempts were made to gather basic data on GED testing in NYC to provide an overview of the system. This activity became one of the more challenging aspects of the study. Data that exist are gathered through independent management information systems, with variable data definitions, and different reporting requirements, methods for compilation and reporting time periods. Because there is no single depository of information or cross agency coordination, it became necessary to contact multiple agencies. In many cases it was impossible to disaggregate data provided. As a result, many of the figures provided in this report are estimations. The 2000 U.S. decennial Census was the primary source for demographic profiles of US, NY State and New York City residents. GEDTS was the primary source for information on state GED testing policies and US and state GED Test performance data. The most recent data available from GEDTS, during the timeframe of this study, cover the period from January 1, 2006 to December 31, 2006. The State Education Department Office of Adult Education and Workforce Development, GED Testing Office provided supplemental information on GED testing performance and

GED candidates in NY State; it was the primary source of statistics on GED performance and test candidates in New York City. The most recent data available from the State Education Department was for the period from January 1, 2007 to December 31, 2007.

In general, the report presented 2000 Census data and information on test performance and GED candidates for the year 2006. In addition to the limitations already discussed, the use of data from different sources had great disadvantages. First, the calculations provided in the report are from different time periods, and therefore, different populations. Second, the most current data for New York State and New York City are not, in general, included in the report text. To provide as much uniformity as possible, the data for NYS and NYC are from the 2006 calendar year (the same time period as the US data). In a few cases, when the topic under discussion occurred in 2007, data from that year are provided. Additionally, when available, information on 2007 test performance and GED candidates is provided in *Appendix B. Notes*. Further information on data presentations in this report is discussed in the notes for each table and citation.

These data limitations were most apparent in the presentation of need, test performance and GED candidate profiles for young adults and workforce populations. Current reporting systems either provide insufficient data or cluster demographics without sufficient detail needed to analyze information. For example, it wasn't possible to create cohorts associated with workforce participation or to match compulsory and statutory school age populations.

However, consistent with the research design, this report includes additional data, particularly in the *Appendix B. Notes*, to stimulate further discussion and review of GED testing in New York City.

Agencies Involved in the Research

Nearly four hundred agencies were involved in this research study. The largest number of the agencies (348) was involved in the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) GED survey. Additionally, 75 agencies had staff who participated in one or more of the focus groups for program managers conducted with the City University of New York, DYCD, or the NYC Regional Adult Education Network. The following 37 agencies, through interviews and planning meetings, provided information on their services and students, discussed their experiences with GED testing and offered suggestions for improvement. Moreover, these agencies provided invaluable guidance in the formation and conduct of the test-taker focus groups and in formulation of the research recommendations.

Brooklyn Public Library
Brooklyn Workforce1 Career Center
City University of New York, Office of Academic Affairs
Community Service Society
Des Moines Area Community College
FEGS

Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies
Flushing High School GED Test Center
GED Testing Services of the American Council on Education
Humanities High School GED Test Center
Iowa Department of Education
Kirkwood Community College
La Guardia Community College, City University of New York
Lehman College, City University of New York
Literacy Assistance Center
National Institute for Literacy
Neighborhood Family Services Coalition
New Heights Neighborhood Center
New York City Center for Economic Opportunity
New York City Department of Youth and Community Development
New York Community Trust
New York City College of Technology, City University of New York
New York City Department of Education, District 79 Superintendent's Office
New York Immigration Coalition
New York State Education Department, Adult Education and Workforce Development
New York University Steinhardt School of Culture, Education and Human Development
Office of Adult and Continuing Education, Department of Education
Queens Educational Opportunity Center, State University of New York
Turning Point
UJA-Federation of New York
Union Settlement Association
United Neighborhood Houses
Youth Development Initiative, Tides Center

The Department of Youth and Community Development, in addition to its key role in administration of the research contract, provided essential administrative support and note takers for the focus group sessions.

The data reports provided by the State Education Department, some of which were prepared to address specific questions raised in this research, were critical to developing an overview of GED testing in NYC and to analyzing the experience of various cohorts.

The City University of New York, the Youth Development Initiative, the Literacy Assistance Center, New Heights Neighborhood Center and the Department of Youth and Community Development provided space necessary for the conduct of the research focus groups.

Appendix B. NOTES

1. The NYC Center for Economic Opportunity, using data from the US 2000 Decennial Census PUMS (Public Use Microdata Sample), reports that in New York City there are 1,577,795 people sixteen-years-of-age or older who are out-of-school and lack a high school diploma.
2. The New York State Education Department (SED) ad hoc report, *High School Equivalency Summary by Test Center* for the Regional Adult Education Network: New York City, January 1, 2006 to December 31, 2006, states that the total number of people tested was 24,976 and the total number of diplomas granted was 10,732.
3. Jenkins, D. (2003). "The Potential of Community Colleges as Bridges to Opportunity for the Disadvantaged: Can it be Achieved on a Large Scale?" Paper presented at the Seminar on Access and Equity Community College Research Center, Teachers College, Columbia University. March.
4. The New York State Education Department (SED) ad hoc report, *High School Equivalency Summary by Test Center* for the Regional Adult Education Network: New York City, January 1, 2007 to December 31, 2007, states that the total number of people tested was 27,301 and the total number of diplomas granted was 13,128. (Note that, in general, this report uses 2006 NYC testing data so these data reference the same time period as the latest available national data from the GED Testing Service. In this note, #4, Jacinto took his exam in March of 2007. Therefore, city GED testing data for 2007 were included in the report text.)
5. General Educational Development Testing Service (GEDTS) of the American Council on Education. (2006). *2006 GED Testing Program Statistical Report*. The report provides information on pass rates by jurisdiction for the period January 1, 2006 to December 31, 2006 (candidates who completed the battery of tests in 2006 may have begun testing in a previous year). The four jurisdictions with the lowest pass rates were:

Number of GED Candidates and Pass Rates by Jurisdiction in 2006

Jurisdiction	Number of GED Candidates	Number of Candidates who Passed	Percentage of Candidates who Passed
Alabama	8,267	4,113	49.8%
District of Columbia	1,014	524	51.7%
Mississippi	10,674	5,979	56.0%
New York	50,564	28,345	56.1%
U.S. Total	580,107	398,409	68.7%

The New York State Education Department reported the following information for 2006 (see note # 2 above).

New York City	24,976	10,732	43.0%
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6. RTI International. (2005). "Profiles of the Adult Education Target Population: Information from the 2000 Census". Prepared for the Division of Adult Education and Literacy, Office of Vocational and Adult Education, U.S. Department of Education. Revised – December.

The following table is a selection from the information provided.

2000 US Census Target Population by Jurisdiction

State/ Jurisdiction	Target Population (16+ without diploma)	Total Population (16 and older)	Target Population as a Percent of Total Population	Rank of Target Population as a Percent of Total Population
Mississippi	536,482	1,881,117	28.52%	1
District of Columbia	90,987	388,219	23.44%	15
New York	2,845,268	12,776,394	22.27%	16
Minnesota	421,699	3,263,066	12.92%	51
U.S. Total	40,834,367	190,978,243	21.38%	

The NYC Data are from the 2000 U.S. Decennial Census PUMS as provided by the NYC Center for Economic Opportunity. (See note #1.)

New York City	1,577,795	5,357,328	29.45%	
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7. Data from the SED ad hoc reports, *High School Equivalency Summary by Test Center* for the Regional Adult Education Network: New York City, for each year 2002 to 2007 (January 1 to December 31) are summarized in the following table:

NYC Number of GED Candidates and Pass Rates by Year

Year (1/1 – 12/31)	Number of GED Candidates	Number of Candidates who Passed	Percentage of Candidates who Passed
2002	17,058	7,115	42%
2003	21,129	9,546	45%
2004	22,995	10,053	44%
2005	22,352	10,345	47%
2006	24,976	10,732	43%
2007	27,301	13,128	49%

8. The US and NYS data are from the "2006 GED Testing Program Statistical Report" (see note #5). The NYC data were provided by the State Education Department in ad hoc reports (see note #2).

9. Table 3 is a presentation of the percentage of the target population – 16-year-olds and older, who are out-of-school and lack a high school diploma – that obtained a GED diploma. A significant limitation in the data presented is that in order to calculate the percentages, it was necessary to use numerators and denominators from different population cohorts. (The numerators are GEDTS data and NY SED data from 2006 while the denominators are U.S. Census data from 2000.)
10. The New York State Education Department (SED) ad hoc report, *GED Statistics Report* for the Regional Adult Education Network: New York City, January 1, 2006 to December 31, 2006, provides data on the sex of GED candidates. Of the candidates that reported information on sex, 55% were female and 45% were male.

The SED *GED Statistics Report*; Regional Adult Education Network: New York City, January 1, 2007 to December 31, 2007, reports that 54% of the GED candidates were female and 46% were male. (Note that because these statistics include all test-takers, including those who only took part of the test battery or who took the test multiple times, the numbers for sex are higher than the numbers for the total number of test-takers in SED summary reports. Therefore, data on sex provided in the report are given as percentiles.)

11. The New York State Education Department (SED) ad hoc report, *GED Statistics Report* for the Regional Adult Education Network: New York City; for January 1, 2006 to December 31, 2006, provides the following information on the age of GED candidates at the time of testing. (Note that because candidates may take all or parts of the exam at different times of the year, the same candidate may be counted in two different age groups. Therefore, the total number of candidates listed by age is greater than the total number of candidates reported in the SED *High School Equivalency Summary by Test Center*. For this reason, the report presents candidates' demographic information using percentiles.)

Number of GED Candidates and Pass Rate by Age; 2006

Age	Number of GED Candidates	% of Total GED Candidates	Number of Diplomas	Pass Rate
16	134	.48%	92	68.66%
17	2,197	7.95%	1,562	71.10%
18	3,013	10.91%	1,817	60.31%
19	3,280	11.87%	1,613	49.18%
20	2,417	8.75%	1,039	42.99%
21	1,795	6.50%	692	38.55%
22	1,480	5.36%	542	36.62%
23	1,253	3.54%	475	37.91%
24	1,006	3.61%	370	36.78%
25+	11,053	40.01%	3,181	28.78%
Total	27,628		11,383	41.20%

The New York State Education Department (SED) ad hoc report, *GED Statistics Report*; Regional Adult Education Network: New York City, January 1, 2007 to December 31, 2007, provides the following information on the age of GED candidates at the time of testing.

Number of NYC GED Candidates and Pass Rate by Age in 2007

Age	Number of GED Candidates	% of Total GED Candidates	Number of Diplomas	Pass Rate
16	126	.43%	81	64.29%
17	2,104	7.13%	1,578	75.00%
18	3,212	10.89%	2,077	64.66%
19	3,401	11.53%	1,824	53.63%
20	2,559	8.67%	1,247	48.73%
21	1,921	6.51%	842	43.83%
22	1,513	5.13%	679	44.88%
23	1,305	4.43%	571	43.75%
24	1,141	3.87%	501	43.91%
25+	12,207	41.40%	4,080	33.42%
Total	29,489		13,480	45.71%

12. American Youth Policy Forum, (2004). "What Do You Know About How the GED Tests Empower America's Young Adults?" A brief on an American Youth Policy Forum. December.

Full quote: "Ninety-seven percent of colleges and universities accept the GED as equivalent to a traditional high school diploma; over five percent of first year college freshmen have earned a GED credential. According to the Society for Human Resource Management, more than 90 percent of U.S. employers regard GED holders as equivalent to high school graduates in hiring, salary and opportunity for advancement."

13. Students who have been attending a GED preparation program are given a preparation code to enter on their GED exam answer sheet. This "prep-code" is used to report test results to the program. However, several program managers cited problems with these reports because their data showed that student information was missing or inaccurate. Test-takers, and others involved with data reporting, described misunderstandings and uneven use of the program codes. An ad hoc report from the NY State Education Department provides the information on test-takers with prep-codes for January 1 to December 31, 2006. For the test-takers in that time period, 36.9% of them provided a prep-code. 49.8% of the NYC GED diplomas in 2006 were awarded to test-takers who provided a program prep-code. Data on the performance of test-takers with prep-codes are summarized in the following table.

Performance of NYC Test-takers with Prep-code 2006

	Tested	Passed	Pass Rate
Test-takers with Prep-code	9,208	5,341	58.0%
Test-takers without Prep-code	15,768	5,391	34.2%
NYC Total Test-takers	24,976	10,732	43.0%

An additional ad hoc report from SED provides information on test-takers with prep-codes for January 1 to December 31, 2007. Of the test-takers in 2007, 33.1% provided a prep-code. 42.1% of the NYC GED diplomas in 2006 were awarded to test-takers who provided a program prep-code. Further information is provided in the following table.

Performance of NYC Test-takers with Prep-code 2007

	Tested	Passed	Pass Rate
Test-takers with Prep-code	9,035	5,522	61.1%
Test-takers without Prep-code	18,266	7,606	41.6%
NYC Total Test-takers	27,301	13,128	49.0%

14. See note # 11.
15. See note #13.
16. As reported in the GEDTS "2006 GED Testing Program Statistical Report", eight states require that candidates for GED testing show evidence of having passed the Official Practice Test (OPT) as part of their application. The following table provides a summary of the number of test-takers and the number of test-takers who passed the GED for the states that require the OPT. Using the data in the table below, the total number of people who passed the GED test, divided by the total number of people tested in those states, was used to calculate the pass rate for states that require the OPT. The U.S. pass rate was reported in the "2006 GED Testing Program Statistical Report".

Performance of GED Candidates in States that Require the OPT in 2006

State	Number of Test-takers	Number Passed	Pass Rate
Alaska	1,943	1,702	
Arkansas	7,998	6,517	
Delaware	639	598	
Iowa	3,683	3,632	
Maine	2,885	2,488	
North Carolina	14,423	12,049	
Kansas	4,515	3,963	
Kentucky	11,890	8,724	
TOTAL WITH OPT	47,976	39,673	82.69%

The number of U.S. test-takers, the number who passed the GED and the pass rate reported by GEDTS are provided for comparison.

U. S. Total	580,107	398,409	68.68%
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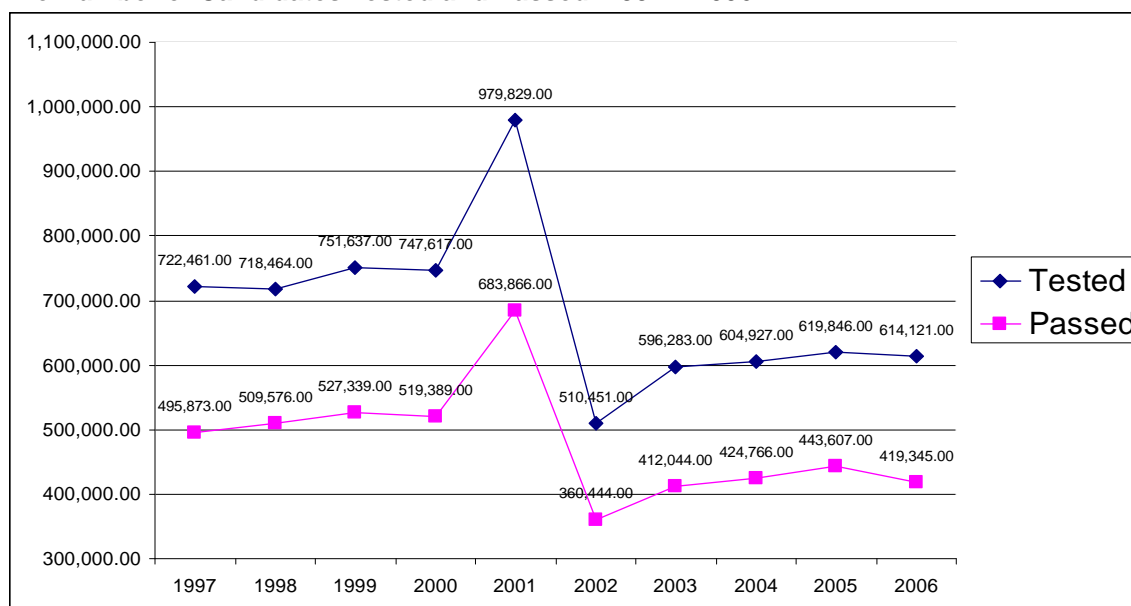
17. The NY State Education Department provided an ad hoc report on testing capacity, the number of test-takers, and the number of test-takers who passed the GED, for each New York City test site in 2007. The information is summarized in the following table.

Test Site Capacity by Number of Test-takers in 2007

Test Site Capacity (Max # of Test-takers)	Number of Test-takers	Number Passed	Pass Rate
150 – 250	9,724	3,927	40.38%
< 150	17,269	9,197	53.28%
NYC Total	26,993	13,124	48.62%

18. General Educational Development Testing Service (GEDTS) of the American Council on Education. (2006). *2006 GED Testing Program Statistical Report*. The report provides information on trends in the number of candidates tested and the pass rates. The chart below presents ten years of data. The number of people tested (who completed the full battery of five sub-tests) in 2001 – the year prior to the introduction of the new GED test series – is 24% higher than the number of people tested in 2000.

The Number of Candidates Tested and Passed: 1997 – 2006



19. To accommodate the waiting list of candidates for the GED exam prior to implementation to the GED Test Version 4 on January 1, 2002, twelve additional exams were scheduled and administered in NYC with support from the GED Testing Service of the American Council on Education. All of these exams were administered at a test site in Queens. As reported by one of the test examiners, 3,647 individuals were contacted for one of eight exams that were administered over five weekends at the end of the summer in 2001. 1,074 people showed for testing. At the end of December, 2001, four additional exams were administered. Of the 1,524 who were invited to testing, 641 were tested.

20. U. S. Census Bureau. (2000). Internet release date: December 19, 2000.
<http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/education/p20-536.html>

Population without a High School Diploma in 2000

Jurisdiction	Total Population 25 and Over	Population 25+ Without a HS Diploma	% of Population Without a HS Diploma
Bronx	794,792	299,686	37.71%
Kings	1,552,870	484,306	31.19%
New York	1,124,987	240,354	21.35%
Queens	1,509,502	387,181	25.65%
Richmond	293,795	51,163	17.41%
New York City	5,276,946	14,626,901	27.72%
New York State	12,542,536	2,626,324	20.94%
US	175,230,000	28,853,000	16.47%

21. An ad hoc report from the NY State Education Department provides test site capacity information (the number of people who could be tested in the test center and the number of test administrations) for thirty-three sites that provided testing in 2007. Sixteen programs serving residential, corrections or other special populations were not included in the calculations presented here.

For the seventeen sites used in the calculation, the total number of people tested in 2007 was 24,619. With 404 GED test administrations at those sites, the combined capacity was 53,095. The proportion of seats filled was 24,619/53,095 or 46.37%.

22. The NY State Education Department ad hoc report on GED Retesters by Year, provides data on the number of people who took the GED test once, twice or three times. In 2006, the percent of people who took the exam more than once was 16.56%.

Percentage of NYC GED Test-takers who took the exam more than once by year

# of Tests	2006		2007	
1 test	83.44%		82.93%	
2 tests	14.15%	16.56%	14.27%	17.07%
3 tests	2.41%		2.80%	

23. The Gazette. (2008). "Wilson, 34, earns diploma". The Associated Press. Published in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. May 5.

24. Return on investment is a critical factor in assessing the impact of public resources. The primary goal of the *Four-year Reform Initiative for GED Testing in New York City* is an increase in the number of GED diplomas for older youth and adults who are out-of-school and lack a high school diploma. In addition to projecting the increased number of diplomas, an analysis of the return on investment in the Initiative includes the projected cost per diploma. These analyses are provided in the tables below.

The tables provide an assessment of 1) the increased efficiencies and growth in diplomas resulting from the initiative reforms, and 2) the increase in State resources to support the basic GED testing system in NYC and to institutionalize initiative reforms. Specific considerations include: a) review of past performance in NYC and other parts of the country; b) investment of new state resources targeted for April 2011, c) increase in demand for testing prior to the January 1, 2012 release of the GED Test (Version 5), d) implementation of the OPT requirements, and e) improvements in test performance.

Projected NYC Test-takers and Diplomas By Year

	% growth test takers	New Test- takers	Tested/ year	Pass Rate	New Diplomas	Diplomas/ Year
2008			28,000	0.48		13,100
2009	0.10	2,800	30,800	0.51	2,608	15,708
2010	0.10	3,080	33,880	0.56	3,265	18,973
2011	0.30	10,164	44,044	0.61	7,894	26,867
2012	0.30	13,213	57,257	0.70	13,213	40,080
New test-takers/ diplomas in 4 years		29,257			26,980	
% increase in 4 years			204.49%			305.95%

The four-year initiative would result in three times the number of annual diplomas.

Projected NYC Resources per Test-taker/Diploma By Year

	Projected					
	2006	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Existing State Resources	\$1,950,000	\$1,950,000				\$1,950,000
New State Resources						\$3,050,000
Test-takers	24,976	28,000	30,800	33,880	44,044	57,257
Diplomas	10,732	13,100	15,708	18,973	26,867	40,080
Cost/test-taker	\$78.07	\$69.64				\$87.33
Cost/diploma	\$181.70	\$148.85				\$124.75

The initiative would result in a reduced cost per diploma. (A decrease to \$124.75 projected cost per diploma for 2012 from \$181.70 cost per diploma in 2006).

Projected Impact on Target Population By Year

	NYC 2006		NYC 2012	
		% of Target Population		% of Target Population
Target Population: Total Population 16+ without a HS Diploma Not in School (2000 Census)	1,577,795		1,577,795	
Total Number of GED Candidates	24,976	1.58%	57,257	3.63%
Total Number of GED Diplomas	10,732	0.68%	40,080	2.54%

The initiative would increase the percent of the target population (persons 16 years old and older who lack a high school diploma and are not in school) that have a GED diploma, from its 2006 level of 0.68% to 2.54% in 2012.

25. As cited by the State Education Department administration, New York State Education Law 317 restricts charging a fee for GED testing.
26. Strawm, J. (2007). "Policies to Promote Adult Education and Postsecondary Alignment". Center for Law and Social Policy. Prepared for the National Commission on Adult Literacy. September.
"Adult education programs especially are hampered by severe under-funding – an annual total of just \$645 government funding per student."
27. The NY State Education Department ad hoc *GED Statistics Report* provides data on the age of candidates at the time of testing. Data on the number of candidates less than 21 years of age for each of the years 2003 to 2007 are summarized below.

NYC GED Candidates Age by Year

Age	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	% Change in 5 Years
Total*	23,514	25,693	25,206	25,323	27,019	14.91%
21+	13,590	15,878	15,992	15,964	17,361	27.75%
<21	9,924	9,815	9,214	9,359	9,658	(2.68%)
% <21	42.20%	38.20%	36.55%	36.96%	35.75%	

*The discrepancies between the total number of candidates in the *Candidates Age by Year* table and the total number of candidates by year in other parts of the report are due to calculations of age when a candidate re-took parts of the exam in the same year but after a birthday had occurred. (The total number of test-takers for 2007 in the above table is less than the number in note #7. This may be because fewer people provided age information.)

28. Additional NY State Education Department ad hoc reports provide the following demographic data for GED test candidates for each of the years 2003 to 2007.

Number of NYC GED Candidates: Language/Accommodation by Year

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
French	0	531	452	328	357
Spanish	0	3076	2865	2591	2463
Accommodations	600	789	693	591	725

NYC GED Pass Rate: Sex by Year

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Female	35%	34%	36%	33%	37%
Male	45%	44%	46%	43%	47%

29. The following table provides detail on the public/private initiative investment needed for each of the four years.

REFORM	Year 1 2008- 2009	Year 2 2009- 2010	Year 3 2010- 2011	Year 4 2011- 2012	GRAND TOTAL
SYSTEM IMPROVEMENTS					
I. Improve Test-takers Exam Readiness					
1. Students Pass OPT					
2. OPT Applicants Receive Priority					
3. Test-takers Readiness Module	40,000		40,000		80,000
4. OPT Requirement for All Test Applicants					
4a. Pilot OPT Assessment Models - (4)	60,000	60,000	60,000		180,000
4b. Develop Procedures for OPT					
II. Strengthen GED Test-site Operations.					
1. Improve Testing Conditions					
2. Expand Testing Options					
3. Increase Number of Test Administrations Prior to Release of GED Exam Version 5					
4. Improve Professional Skills of Testing Staff	100,000	100,000	100,000	100,000	400,000
III. NYC GED Testing Infrastructure					
1. Formalize GED Testing Network	125,000	125,000	125,000	125,000	500,000
2. GED Field Liaisons - (5)	250,000	250,000	250,000	250,000	1,000,000
3a. Create Testing Schedule/Application MIS	185,000	35,000	35,000	35,000	290,000
3b. Convene Data Group	15,000	15,000			30,000
3c. Develop Data Procedures		15,000			15,000
3d. Enhance SED GED Database					
4. Develop 311 Capacity					
5. Test-taker and Practitioner Feedback					
IV. Improve Awareness of GED Diploma					
1. ALECC Training for Practitioners	40,000		40,000		80,000
2. Public Awareness Campaign (plus an estimated \$500,000 PR contribution from a corporate partner)		45,000			45,000
3. City Planning Report on Individuals Without Diploma					
SYSTEM RESOURCES					
V. Build Resources for NYC GED Testing					
1. Launch Advocacy Campaign	50,000	50,000	50,000	50,000	200,000
2. Increase State GED Testing Funds to \$10 million					
SYSTEM OVERSIGHT					
VI. Oversight & Development of Testing Reforms					
1. Establish NYC GED Testing Reform Committee	20,000	20,000	20,000	20,000	80,000
2. Research Implementation Areas	40,000				40,000
3. Research Other Providers & Special Populations		60,000			60,000
New Initiative Allocations	925,000	775,000	720,000	580,000	\$3,000,000

- The dollar figures project how the \$3 million public/private investment in the *Initiative* would be allocated.
- The areas in green show where state legislative investments would be allocated.